

THE NEW YORK TIMES
22 January, 1985

Aid in Capture of Ex-Agent Is in Trouble Himself

By JEFF GERTH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 21 — The man who won praise from the Government for helping to lure the former intelligence officer Edwin P. Wilson to trial in 1982 now faces serious legal problems of his own.

Ernest R. Keiser, who on behalf of the Federal Government enticed Mr. Wilson back from Libya, was convicted over the weekend by a jury in Westchester County, N.Y., of larceny in the second degree and of filing false business statements.

Last month, the day before he was scheduled to go to trial, Mr. Keiser told

police in Fairfax County, Va., that he had been shot in the back, and the Westchester trial was postponed for a month.

Today, in a Federal District Court in Tampa, Fla., Judy S. Hoyer, an Assistant United States Attorney, said that police officials "are investigating the possibility that Mr. Keiser was involved in his own shooting."

An official with the Fairfax police, who requested anonymity, said in an interview today that Mr. Keiser had suffered superficial wounds, that the police had no suspects in the case and that they were suspicious of the circumstances surrounding the shooting.

Mr. Keiser, in an interview today, said any suggestion that he had arranged his own shooting was "outrageous and absolutely false." His attorney, William I. Aronwald, said the notion was not believable because the shot had narrowly missed vital organs.

Both Mr. Keiser, who is 64 years old, and his wife, Bahira, face still other criminal charges. Mrs. Keiser was scheduled to go on trial today in Tampa on charges of falsely stating in an affidavit last July that the couple had virtually no cash. A Federal indictment said Mrs. Keiser knew there was more than \$34,000 in a bank account.

Mrs. Keiser has denied the charges,

but failed to appear today in court in Tampa for the start of her trial.

Mr. Aronwald, her attorney, said she had not appeared because she was ill.

Mrs. Keiser's affidavit was submitted in connection with bail hearings for Mr. Keiser, who was indicted in Tampa last year on charges that he had promised an indicted banker that he would get the indictment dropped in return for \$60,000. Mr. Keiser is contesting those charges.

Both the Tampa case and the Westchester trial involve attempts by Mr. Keiser to raise money for a land deal in Florida. Mr. Aronwald said he was considering appealing the New York conviction.

A key issue in the Tampa case is Mr. Keiser's relationship with the Government. Mr. Keiser and his attorney say that at the time Mr. Keiser was work-

ing to help capture Robert L. Vesco, a businessman sought by the United States on charges of fraud and of making illegal campaign contributions.

Mr. Keiser and Mr. Aronwald say that over the last few decades Mr. Keiser has worked for a variety of Government agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency.

Justice Department officials have said little publicly about Mr. Keiser's claims of Government service.

Mr. Aronwald said that Mr. Keiser's case had produced "a struggle within the Department of Justice."

Two Justice Department officials, speaking on the condition they not be identified, agreed that there was a dispute over the handling of Mr. Keiser's case, including the release of certain documents to the defense. One element in the dispute, according to the offi-

cials, is how the department should treat Mr. Keiser's case in view of what some see as his heroic role in the Wilson capture.

Mr. Keiser, at the time a New York businessman, helped persuade Mr. Wilson, who had been a fugitive for two years, to leave Libya for a safe haven in the Dominican Republic where he could resume his intelligence work for the United States.

When the former C.I.A. agent arrived in the Dominican Republic he was refused entry and put on a plane to New York City. After a number of trials, Mr. Wilson was sentenced to more than 60 years in prison for smuggling arms to Libya and other crimes.